

**Closing Statement by**  
**Deputy Assistant Secretary LilianaAyalde**  
**U.S. Department of State Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs**  
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- We have had constructive deliberations today with our Bahamian partners. Our frank and informed discussion provides the foundation for renewed and redoubled cooperation on the important issues on our joint agenda. The highest levels of our respective governments have a deep and abiding interest in our effective cooperation, and we are pleased to work toward realizing their vision.
- During our discussions we identified resources and outlined strategies to address challenges to both our countries from irregular migration, the threat of illicit trafficking of narcotics and firearms, growing levels of violent crime and our common concern about human trafficking. In particular, we discussed enhancing the sharing of regional electronic surveillance data through the Caribbean Nations Aerial Intercept program and building closer collaboration between the U.S. Coast Guard and Bahamian Immigration Authorities.
- This will enhance our joint overall situational awareness with the goal of increasing effectiveness in deterring and interdicting irregular migration and illicit trafficking.

- I was gratified to hear of the government's ongoing efforts to address trafficking in persons (TIP). TIP remains a scourge that is exacting a horrendous human and social toll in The Bahamas and the United States. While much work remains to be done, I am encouraged by the steps the Bahamian government has taken to implement protocols to identify and protect potential victims. I applaud the government's initiative to enhance bilateral counter-TIP cooperation through a proposed pilot project that would team up U.S. and Bahamian law enforcement agents to work together to investigate TIP cases.
- Our cooperation on counter firearms trafficking has increased significantly in the last 18-months. The Bahamas is unique in the Caribbean for its success in recording 100 percent of illegal firearms through the Department of Justice Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosive (ATF)'s eTrace program. Most recently, the Department of State and ATF signed an interagency agreement to carry out a firearms interdiction and training program through the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI).
- The United States shares The Bahamas concern about growing levels of violent crime and applauds the government's initiative to counter crime, including efforts to empower local communities through the Urban Renewal program. Future cooperation between our two countries will build upon existing cooperation, which for the past few years has seen a significant increase under the Caribbean Basin Security Initiative (CBSI).

- The U.S. Government has been working with the Bahamian government to make investments in the areas of law enforcement professionalization, counternarcotics, justice reform, and prison management capacity building. Tomorrow morning, our governments will continue this partnership with the signing of an agreement to provide an additional \$2.1 M as part of CBSI to support mutually agreed upon projects. In that same spirit of cooperation, we urge you to continue to seek ways to adjust policy or legislation to prioritize information sharing on crime and border and maritime control.
- I can assure you that we will be listening and collaborating with your experts to better understand not just the challenges that face our nations, but also the underlying causal factors. We will work closely with you in the coming months to develop programs on community policing and firearms interdiction and training through CBSI. We will further strengthen our OPBAT partnership by reconstructing a hangar facility in Great Inagua.
- I understand there are plans to meet again in the spring during the Joint Task Force forum to take stock of progress and to coordinate again as a group. I look forward to hearing about the progress we will make between today and that future meeting.

- In particular, I am encouraged that the government of The Bahamas and the government of the United States have been working hard on several partnership agreements including a memorandum of cooperation for security at pre-clearance facilities, a memorandum of understanding on counter-piracy cooperation and further cooperation on sharing regional electronic surveillance information. We are hopeful that we will be able to further cement our partnership by signing these agreements very soon.
- I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all involved in the effort it takes to organize meetings of this nature. I want to extend my special thanks to the Government of The Bahamas, in particular to Prime Minister Christie for his personal involvement, and to Ministers Nottage and Mitchell for hosting these discussions. It was a wonderful venue and we enjoyed your generous hospitality.